MONTGOMERY COUNTY FOREST CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

May 1, 2009

The Honorable Isiah Leggett, County Executive
Montgomery County, Maryland
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

The Honorable Phil Andrews, President
& Members of the Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: FY2010 Montgomery County Budget/Forest and tree recommendations

Dear Mr. Leggett, Mr. Andrews and Members of the Council:

The Montgomery County Forest Conservation Advisory Committee (FCAC) is aware of the very difficult decisions facing the County in the months ahead during the process of finalizing the FY10 budget. The county budget is rife with multiple competing priorities. However, the cost of not acting to conserve vital natural resources in our county is also high. To that end, we have reviewed the *County Climate Protection Plan* released by the Sustainability Working Group (SWG) in mid-January along with the items related to trees and forests in the *County Executive's Recommended Budget for FY10.* We are offering our comments and recommendations in this letter.*

We are pleased to see that the SWG included a section of the *Climate Protection Plan* covering recommendations for Forestry and Agriculture. Many of the items listed in the plan are already underway and are using existing resources or are recommendations that will be both low-cost and cost effective to implement. In this letter, we have listed recommendations from the plan along with our comments.

The FY10 budget proposed by the County Executive allocates $50,000 to support the Climate Change Protection Non-Departmental Account so that the recommendations of the SWG can be implemented. We recommend that this amount remain intact throughout the budget process so that the efforts of this 26-member working group will come to fruition. The $50,000 figure is modest, yet may be able to support the early phases of the climate protection plan.

In addition, our committee is aware that the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for our county street tree maintenance program is proposed for a cut of $500,000. Respectfully, we request that the $1 million established for the program in previous budgets be restored in the final county budget for FY10. The CIP budget for street trees is applied toward pruning that is essential to the vitality of our

* Please note that the agency representatives (County, MNCPPC, and utilities) serving on this Committee expressly recused themselves from discussion of this letter, and take no position on the statements contained herein.

street trees. Because of already limited resources, we see the ill effects of lack of maintenance of trees in the county rights-of-way (ROW) on a daily basis. Left unmaintained, our street trees have shorter life spans and become hazardous when dead limbs are left to fall on residents and property. We often lose our street trees from lack of maintenance and disease. With aging mature trees in many sections of the county, combined with the decline in tree cover as a result of development and disease of our mature trees, we cannot afford to jeopardize the health of our street trees.

An example of a program where money was well-invested by our county is the gypsy moth suppression program in cooperation with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). In May of 2008, the County sprayed 1,061 acres in addition to 1,205 acres treated by MDA. The result was a dramatic decline in the gypsy moth populations compared to surrounding untreated counties and a Department-initiated decrease in the budget for this program in the FY10 county budget recommendation. The DEP recommendation for this decrease is based on the success of the gypsy moth program and no need for additional resources in the FY10 budget.

It is the consensus of our committee that if Montgomery County makes similar upfront investments in proactive programs for trees in the county right-of-way, we will have a better chance of seeing results of routine maintenance programs. Now is not the time to reduce the CIP budget for street tree maintenance by 50%.

Rather than making cuts in existing programs, our committee asks that you look for ways to maximize our existing programs designed to increase the tree and forestry canopy in Montgomery County. We ask that partnerships and leveraging relationships within county agencies be considered along with leaving the existing budgets for tree and forestry-related programs intact for FY10. We hope that as our elected officials you will work to ensure that programs related to forest and tree preservation are fully funded in the final FY10 county budget.

With this letter, we are including our comments on elements of the *Climate Protection Plan* and a list of statistics on the economic value of trees. Thank you for consideration of our request for the FY10 county budget. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding our request.

Sincerely,

Anne Merwin
Chair, Montgomery County Forest Conservation Advisory Committee

Cc: Bob Hoyt

Specific comments regarding the SWG recommendations from the climate report follow:

Recommendation F&A-1: Develop an accurate inventory of forest cover and tree canopy in Montgomery County, and set forest cover and tree canopy goals. **FCAC Comment:** A forest and tree canopy study is already underway (coordinated by DEP and MNCPPC) so that the county will have access to 2006 aerial photography and GIS-remote sensing technology from 2008. Once completed, we hope this information will be available online for future land use planning purposes. In addition, we hope that future efforts to compile accurate data for decision making related to forests and trees in the county will be supported in the budget. We note the emphasis on Results-Based Budgeting and accountability and the use of data to drive the decision-making process in the FY10 County Executive's Budget. We ask that improved data for forest and tree canopy be treated as a priority and in alignment with the same philosophy of using data to demonstrate the performance of county programs related to forest and tree conservation.

Recommendation F&A-2: Develop a comprehensive approach that protects and enhances forest and tree resources. **FCAC Comment**: We support this approach and see this as a collaborative effort between DEP, DPS, DPWT (street tree program), Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), Maryland Department of Natural Resources and external stakeholders. For too long, our county has taken a piecemeal approach to forest and tree protection. We do not see this as an item that is in need of additional funding in the budget but rather as an expense of time on the part of staff involved in the Countywide Green Infrastructure Master Plan and agencies listed.

Recommendation F&A-3: Lobby the State of Maryland to revise and update the State Roadside Tree Law (RTL) and its implementing regulations, as well as enforce the existing law. Explore opportunities to increase the role of the County departments and agencies in protecting trees in the right-of-way (ROW). **FCAC Comment:** Legislation was passed in the 2009 Maryland General Assembly session to amend the State Roadside Tree Law, allowing local governments more control over roadside trees. We recommend that Montgomery County become proactive in the development of its own strengthened roadside tree ordinance.

Recommendation F&A-4: Extend the County's current property tax credit for energy conservation and renewable energy measures to include tree planting. **FCAC Comment:** Our committee endorses this recommendation and hopes that the Council will act to put this measure in place. We see this tax credit as a valuable tool to encourage homeowners to plant trees. Similar programs in other local jurisdictions have proven to be effective.

Recommendation F&A-5: Create landscape incentives in urban areas to increase number, quality, and survivability of trees planted in the public right-of-way and on private property. **FCAC Comment**: Could the survey of forest cover and urban tree canopy be used for this purpose? Could we look at areas that would benefit the most from an increase in the number, quality and survivability of tree plantings and then compile a list of recommended areas for inclusion in a public database?

Recommendation F&A-6: Increase shade tree planting and maintenance in public and private parking lots. **FCAC Comment:** This might be suggested (not mandated) as part of the development review process within M-NCPPC.

Recommendation F&A-8: Encourage and foster school programs integral to curricula that promote increased student involvement and engagement in forest and tree planting, conservation and

maintenance programs within their communities and on available public property. Engage surrounding communities in planting and conserving trees on private property. **FCAC Comment:** Our committee has reviewed the program to increase the tree canopy goals for the Frederick County Public Schools. We see the Frederick County program partnering with the Potomac Conservancy as an excellent model. We recommend that a similar program be implemented in Montgomery County.

Recommendation F&A-9: Develop an educational campaign to convey the vital role trees play in the long-term sustainability and health of the County. **FCAC Comment**: This is essential to the success of any community program to increase tree and forest canopy. We note that the FY10 budget recommendation includes improving county services with the use of a 311 Call Center along with a County Indicators Project and Results-Based Budgeting that calls for enhancing opportunities "for cross departmental/agency coordination and resource allocation decisions..." We urge our county policy makers to ensure that those involved with these initiatives are well-trained to respond to citizen inquiries about tree and forestry protection. We are asking that the DEP, DPS and M-NCPPC coordinate to create a seamless web presence for educating the public about the role of trees in the ecosystem and local economy. We would like to recommend that the county embark on a more aggressive community tree-planting program as part of public education.

Recommendation F&A-10: Manage non-native invasive pests that threaten forests and trees. **FCAC Comment:** We urge you to fully fund county programs to manage invasive species. This is consistent with our note above about the success of the 2009 gypsy moth program. If we fund programs to manage invasives effectively, we will be able to sustain our existing tree canopy and increase canopy simultaneously if newly planted trees are able to withstand threats from invasives.

Statistics on the Economic Value of Trees

HEATING AND COOLING COSTS - A 25 foot tree reduces annual heating and cooling costs of a typical residence by 8 to 12 percent, producing an average $10 savings per American household. Also, buildings and paving in city centers create a heat-island effect. A mature tree canopy reduces air temperatures by about 5 to 10° F, influencing the internal temperatures of nearby buildings. -- *Center for Urban Horticulture, University of Washington.*

The net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day. — *U.S. Department of Agriculture*

Landscaping can reduce air conditioning costs by up to 50 percent, by shading the windows and walls of a home. — *American Public Power Association*

If you plant a tree today on the west side of your home, in 5 years your energy bills should be 3% less. In 15 years the savings will be nearly 12%. — *Dr. E. Greg McPherson, Center for Urban Forest Research*

Trees properly placed around buildings can reduce air conditioning needs by 30 percent and can save 20 - 50 percent in energy used for heating. — *USDA Forest Service*

Shade from trees can cool buildings up to 20 degrees in the summer *(Source: City of Portland*). One large deciduous tree planted within 60 feet of the west side of an average-sized home in the Northwest reduces carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming and lowers the home's cooling costs by about $444 over a 40-year lifespan, assuming an average cost of $.0941 per kwh *(Source of calculation formula: Center for Urban Forest Research, Davis, California).*

AIR QUALITY AND CLEANSING - A typical person consumes about 386 lb of oxygen per year. A healthy tree, say a 32 ft tall ash tree, can produce about 260 lb of oxygen annually - two trees supply the oxygen needs of a person each year! Also, cooler air temperatures created by tree canopies reduce smog levels by up to 6%, producing savings in air clean-up campaigns. Finally, a mature tree absorbs from 120 to 240 lbs of the small particles and gases of air pollution. In Sacramento, CA, for instance, this represents a value of $28.7 million. – *Center for Urban Horticulture, University of Washington*.

One acre of forest absorbs six tons of carbon dioxide and puts out four tons of oxygen. This is enough to meet the annual needs of 18 people. — *U.S. Department of Agriculture*

There are about 60-to 200- million spaces along our city streets where trees could be planted. This translates to the potential to absorb 33 million more tons of CO2 every year, and saving $4 billion in energy costs. — *National Wildlife Federation*

For cities struggling to meet the Environmental Protection Agency's air quality goals and build adequate wastewater treatment facilities, trees offer high return on investment. A 2005 study of municipal trees in Boulder, CO, estimates the city gets a $3.67 return on every dollar spent on the urban forest." -- *Christian Science Monitor, Story by Ethan Gilsdorf, April 26, 2006 on "What is the Value of a Tree?"*

IMPROVED WATER QUALITY - The canopy of a street tree absorbs rain, reducing the amount of water that will fall on pavement and then must be removed by a stormwater drainage system. In one study, 32 feet tall street trees intercepted rainfall, reducing stormwater runoff by 327 gallons. Savings

are possible since cities can install surface water management systems that handle smaller amounts of runoff. -- *Center for Urban Horticulture, University of Washington*.

The planting of trees means improved water quality, resulting in less runoff and erosion. This allows more recharging of the ground water supply. Wooded areas help prevent the transport of sediment and chemicals into streams. — *USDA Forest Service*

The 2005 study of municipal trees in Boulder, CO, found that the average tree intercepts 1,271 gallons of precipitation annually, saving the city $523,311 in storm-water retention costs. ." -- *Christian Science Monitor, Story by Ethan Gilsdorf, April 26, 2006 on "What is the Value of a Tree?"*

Each year Portland's trees intercept half a billion gallons of stormwater to save more than $11 million in stormwater management costs. -- Source: *Oregonian, Oct. 3, 2007*

Every 1,000 urban trees planted in the Northwest today saves the region more than a million dollars in stormwater management, pollution abatement, and energy costs. -- *Source: Center for Urban Forest Research, Davis, California. .*

IMPACT ON PROPERTY VALUE – Homes adjacent to parks and open spaces command 8% to 20% higher prices than comparable homes. *– J. Compton (2001) The Impact of Trees and Open Space on Property Values and the Property Tax Base. Ashburn, VA: National Park and Recreation Association*

In one study, 83% of realtors believe that mature trees have a "strong or moderate impact" on the salability of homes listed for under $150,000; on homes over $250,000, this perception increases to 98%. *— Arbor National Mortgage & American Forests*

A mature tree can often have an appraised value of between $1,000 and $10,000. *—Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers*

Landscaping, especially with trees, can increase property values as much as 20 percent. - *Management Information Services/International City-County Management Association (ICMA)*

Healthy, mature trees add an average of 10 percent to a property's value. *—USDA Forest Service*

ECONOMIC STIMULUS -- Trees can be a stimulus to economic development, attracting new business and tourism. Commercial retail areas are more attractive to shoppers, apartments rent more quickly, tenants stay longer, and space in a wooded setting is more valuable to sell or rent. *—The Arbor Day Foundation*

Rental rates were 7% higher for properties having a quality landscape versus comparable properties lacking that value. - *K. Laverne and Winson-Geiederman, 2003. The Influence of Trees and Landscaping on Rents at Office Buildings. Journal of Arboriculture 29, 5, 281-290.*

Shoppers are willing to pay about 10% higher prices for products in a shopping area with trees, as opposed to a comparable shopping district without trees. *– K. Wolfe (2003). Public response to the Urban Forest in Inner-City Business Districts. Journal of Arboriculture, 29, 3, 117-26*

Nationally, the 60 million street trees have an average value of $525 per tree. *— Management Information Services, ICMA*